

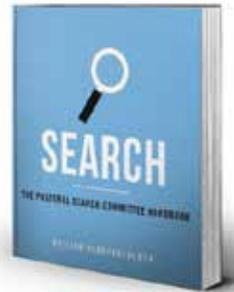
# Up the Creek Without a Pastor

## Hunting Creek Baptist Church

**“Finding your church’s next pastor is as serious as an organ transplant.”**

That’s how William Vanderbloeman describes the pastor search process in his book, *Search: The Pastoral Search Committee Handbook*. Having assisted several hundred churches and having worked with over 10,000 pastoral candidates, he is widely regarded as an authority on the subject. With such a serious matter at hand, a church needs to seek God’s face and prepare with the proper tools.

In March 2018, **Hunting Creek Baptist Church** in Big Island, VA found itself “up a creek” without a pastor. Since the average length of a church’s pastor search is between 12 and 24 months, it was beyond expectations when the church celebrated the installation of its new pastor just nine months later. The Lord led the search team members every step



of the way and clearly directed them to the pastor He had for the congregation, Rev. Ken Bledsoe.

Perhaps your church is beginning the search for a pastor and would like to glean from another church that has recently walked this path. Here are some grains of wisdom from Hunting Creek's pastor search process.

### **PASTOR SEARCH TEAM**

Potential search team members need to understand the degree of commitment required to serve in this capacity. At Hunting Creek, Morgan Osbourn, a retired businessman, chaired the team.

He recalls, "This was the most time-consuming and spiritually intense thing I've gone through in several years. I was literally exhausted when we were finished." Although it's a rewarding process, the search team invests the most time and energy in the process.

### **TRAINING AND RESOURCES**

To prepare for the task ahead, the team received training and consulted resources. Osbourn notes, "The connection with the [SBCV] regional missionary was very helpful—I didn't even know this sort of help was available."

He also relied heavily upon Vanderbloeman's book, which was provided to each team member as a part of the SBCV Pastor Search Committee Training. Other vital tools included an SBCV-provided demographic study and LifeWay's Compensation Study. According to Chairman Osbourn, each of these resources helped the team complete the tasks necessary to progress through the phases of the search process.

### **UNITY AND THE CHURCH SURVEY**

What most surprised Osbourn about his experience leading the search team was the unanimity among the team members on the right candidate. "We were a pretty diverse group.... When that happened, it was pretty amazing."

He attributes their agreement to an early step in the process—the church survey. A church survey provides the committee members a better understanding of the needs and expectations of individual church members. The committee compiled the survey results and compared the findings to biblical principles

of pastoral leadership. This helped them outline important qualities to seek in potential candidates. Survey results help the search team members better represent the interests of the entire congregation.

Because of the survey, "We never got too out of bounds regarding the parameters we were looking for in a candidate," Osbourn recalls.

### **INTERIM PASTOR**

Another source of assistance for Hunting Creek was its interim pastor. Not every church chooses to utilize an interim, but Hunting Creek hired retired pastor, Dr. Philip Parker, to fill the pulpit and offer counsel to the search team.

An interim, explains Parker, "can help the committee review the prospective candidates and provide insightful information based upon his years of pastoral experience."

### **COMMUNICATING WITH A CANDIDATE**

When reflecting on what led him from New Jersey to Virginia, Pastor Bledsoe, recalls, "It certainly has a great deal to do with prayer, honesty, transparency, and what I believe was healthy advice and the right leadership on the search team."

The search team had sent him a questionnaire to complete. "The early questionnaire was fairly thorough and, in some ways, intriguing," says Bledsoe. "A great deal can be understood about a church by the questions they ask. The questionnaire significantly reflected areas of ministry that the church had been wrestling with over the last few years. It helped in the interview process to explore those areas.... The team was very upfront with me. That helped me be upfront with the team about my giftedness and calling."

### **SELECTING A NEW PASTOR**

With a search team ready to seek God's face and armed with trustworthy resources, Hunting Creek Baptist Church found its next pastor. If your church is in need of a pastor, contact your SBCV regional missionary to get started. The SBC of Virginia stands ready to help.